

## MINUTES OF THE STAPLE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 7.30pm** in Staple Village Hall.

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Bartlett (Chairman), J Kirk(Vice-Chairman) Loukes, D Kirk, Davis-Marks, Martin and Ewart.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** There was 1 member of the public in attendance, Cllr S Chandler (KCC), Cllr M Porter(DDC) and Hannah Biggs-Halles (clerk).

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

### 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1. The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 11th October 2023 were agreed as a true record, proposed by Cllr D Kirk and seconded by Cllr M Davis-Marks.

3.2. To report and discuss any completed actions/matters arising therefrom not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

3.2.1. Virtual Meetings – Following discussion at October's meeting, the clerk sought advice from Rebecca Brough at DDC Democratic Support. She has confirmed that, currently, it is not legal to conduct council meetings over Zoom. Members of the public can watch virtually but Cllrs cannot contribute virtually. The Levelling Up Bill may change this but it still needs to go through Parliament.

4. **PUBLIC SESSION (Max. 15 minutes)** Opportunity for members of public to make representations, answer questions and give evidence in respect of the business on the agenda. A member of the public shall not speak for more than 4 minutes and should direct comments to the chairman. Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wishes to speak, the chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking. A question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given.  
No representations or questions from the public.

### 5. FINANCE

5.1. Financial Statements for October 2023 to include income, expenditure and bank reconciliation as at 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023.

The Clerk briefed the Council on our current financial situation and provided print outs of the year-end forecast. The Clerk raised concerns regarding the lack of reserves. It is advised to keep 6-9 months' worth of precept in reserves. Cllr J Kirk felt that holding too much money would not be a good idea as it had been queried in the past when the Council were saving for the SID devices. Cllr J Kirk raised that we don't need too much in reserve as we don't hold too many assets. The clerk raised that we don't have a current Asset Register.

Our spending YTD is relatively low but we have several large bills still to pay this financial year. In 2022/23 we overspent (payments vs receipts) by almost £2000. There was considerable discussion regarding the accuracy of the financial records as many Cllrs do not recall various expenses. It was agreed that the Clerk will cross reference the minutes against the financial records to ensure they are correct.

There was discussion regarding whether to raise the precept. The Chairman raised that we have one of the lowest precepts in the District. Cllrs Martin and Davis-Marks were both against raising the precept in the current cost of living crisis. The Clerk compared our current precept cost per Band D property (£38.69) to that of a local Band B property in another Parish (£94.18) so there is space to increase costs.

Cllr M Davis-Marks suggested that we should be looking at cutting costs rather than raising the precept. Our biggest cost last year was grants and donations to the Village Hall and the Wildlife Friendly Village, as well as costs relating to the Jubilee. The grants to the Wildlife Friendly Village were queried by Cllrs, who recall only one payment of £494.66 compared with the £1047.58 currently on the accounts. Most other costs are unavoidable. Cllr Davis-Marks queried why we give such a large sum to the Village Hall every year and whether the Village Hall could instead request the money from the Country Fayre. Or whether the Parish Council could request money from the Fayre. They both could do so, they just don't currently.

Cllr J Kirk raised that the Parish Council has always supported the Village Hall to run, and should continue to do so, as it is owned by the Council.

Cllrs offered to support the Clerk in identifying some unknown transactions from this and last financial year.

5.2. Bills to be approved (to include those received after the agenda was printed)

5.2.1. Clerk's expenses (£88.26), Salary (£271.05) & overtime (£50.04) Cllr Loukes requested a breakdown of the Clerk's expenses which was given verbally and will be provided in advance of future meetings.

5.2.2. Scribe Accounting Software - £328.32 – unanimously agreed to cancel our Scribe subscription and instead use Excel.

5.2.3. DDC Election - £102.76

Items 5.2.1 and 5.2.3 proposed by Cllr M Davis-Marks and proposed by Cllr L Ewart.

5.3. Bills to be ratified

None

5.4. Budget 2024/5

See discussion under item 5.1. We will receive correspondence from DDC in December regarding our Precept demand for 2024/25. The Clerk has provided an example, worst-case-scenario budget to be reviewed and discussed at December's meeting.

6. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED To review correspondence received since the previous meeting which has not been included in the agenda

6.1. Received before circulation of the agenda

6.1.1. 12/10/23 - Parishioner reports leak and pothole opposite The Vineyard – Cllr Bartlett contacted KCC and then Southern Water.

6.1.2. 15/10/23 – Enquiry regarding local history – Thanks to Cllr J Kirk for his response

6.1.3. 28/10/23 – Barclays – request for further information – The Clerk rang Barclays as requested in the email and was advised that they would call back. They have yet to do so. The Clerk will contact them again.

6.1.4. 30/10/23 – DDC – Green Infrastructure consultation

6.1.5. 31/10/23 – KALC Dover Area Committee Minutes – Cllr Davis-Marks queried why we don't have a representative at these meetings and it was discussed that the Council hasn't had the capacity to send a representation previously. The next meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January in Guston, Dover.

6.2. Received after circulation of the agenda

6.2.1. 1/11/2023 – KCC – Further correspondence regarding the local bridleway dispute. The correspondence contains all relevant evidence and requests any final queries be made by the 21<sup>st</sup> of November.

6.2.2. 1/11-2023 – KALC Training – The Clerk in Action Course is running in December. The Council unanimously agrees to the Clerk attending. The cost is £30 (the other 50% to be paid by Tilmanstone Parish Council).

7. REPORTS (to be provided in advance in writing where possible please)

7.1. District Councillor

Cllr Porter provided his report in advance of this evening's meeting (Appendix a). Past events led the clerk to believe it shouldn't be circulated before the meeting. The clerk will circulate as soon as possible and relay any queries to Cllr Porter or Cllr Bartlett.

Cllr Porter also informed us that the cap of £2 on single bus fares has been extended until the end of 2024.

Throughout December all Dover car parks will be free to use, Monday-Friday. NOT at weekends.

7.2. County Councillor

Cllr Chandler sent her report immediately after our meeting (Appendix b)

Cllr Chandler shared with us the current effort being made by KCC to rebalance the budget for this year and some of the main issues the Council is facing, such as huge increases in the cost of providing Adult Social care and Children's Services.

Cllr Davis-Marks queried what the current deficit is - £44.4m (roughly 1.1% of their budget)

Cllr Chandler also announced a nature recovery strategy called Making Space for Nature in Kent.

Cllr Davis-Marks queried whether Southern Water would be engaging with the scheme – Cllr

Chandler shared that they will be present but their active involvement remains to be seen.

Cllr Chandler also shared with us how well KCC responded to Storm Ciaran.

Cllr Davis-Marks queried whether Cllr Chandler is aware of the Mill Road/Mill Lane development and the impact it is having on the roads with considerable sized, dangerous potholes. Cllr Davis-Marks also asked why the tax payer, through KCC is responsible for making the roads safe during the development, rather than the developers.

Cllr Chandler stated that, if it was agreed within the planning application that the developers would only make good the roads once the development is complete, it will be very hard to change this. Cllr Chandler stated that it will potholes will be dealt with in order of severity, with the biggest and deepest being dealt with first, as they are safety critical. Surface degradation, smaller pothole and the wearing away of the edges of roads will be lower priority. It was also noted that adverse weather will impact how much can be done.

Cllr Chandler requested that the Clerk email over all relevant details regarding the potholes which have been reported but not dealt with. Cllr D Kirk raised that he measured the largest pothole and is a huge 220mm deep.

There was then some discussion regarding the flooding in various places around the village and impact this may be having on the state of the roads.

### 7.3. Village Hall and Recreation Grounds

Cllr J Kirk (Village Hall Chairman) advised that while we are awaiting safety checks on the playground, Cllr D Kirk has kindly made some much-needed repairs and paint touch ups.

The Committee have also sought quotes for repairs on the guttering. The lowest quote of roughly £300 has been accepted.

As discussed at the previous meeting, bookings are down but the committee have agreed to bring any ideas or suggestions to the next meeting to be actioned in an attempt to increase bookings.

The Chairman suggested putting an advert in the December Escallop, as it is delivered to the whole village.

There was some discussion on the success of other local village halls and some potential ideas moving forward.

### 7.4. Highways (SID, Speedwatch, HIP)

Cllr Loukes has provided a Speedwatch report (appendix c).

Woodnesborough Parish Council's SID has not been recovered. The police think that someone may have thought it was taking number plates. Our SID is still in storage in case of further thefts.

The Clerk to Wingham Parish Council has asked whether Staple Parish Council would be happy to receive a report from 2 members of the A257 Group, at our next meeting. The Council agreed unanimously.

Cllr Ewart was asked at October's meeting to check the state of the road markings in Shatterling. Cllr Ewart reports back that the road markings are faded but, having been assessed by KCC, the fading isn't severe enough for them to be redone.

#### 7.4.1. Highways Improvement Plan Review

Cllr Loukes ran through each section of the HIP and it was agreed that, other than items that are unaffordable for the Council, have been categorised as unsuitable by KCC, or KCC themselves are responsible for providing, there is nothing left on the HIP for the Council to action. The Council thanked Cllr McCollum for all his hard work on the HIP.

Cllr Chandler suggested that the flooding which has been discussed could be raised through the HIP. It is a formal way of reporting Highways concerns and, if KCC don't feel it should be raised that way, they will suggest an alternative but at least it begins the process. The Council thanked Cllr Chandler for the useful suggestion and it was agreed that the Clerk will begin work on updating the HIP.

### 7.5. Footpaths

Following October's meeting, Cllr Loukes wrote in The Escallop to request that parishioners report back to him regarding the condition of local footpaths, and raise any issues directly with him. Unfortunately, there has been no response so far.

The Council discussed at length the condition of local footpaths and the fact that there are some paths which haven't been maintained, as they should be, for a long time. It was agreed that it would be unreasonable to expect paths to be cleared and reinstated currently, due to the weather.

Cllr Loukes provided Cllrs and the Clerk with the requested map, including reference numbers for all paths. All paths marked in yellow have not been reinstated properly.

Cllr Loukes recently attended a meeting with The Ramblers and found it incredibly informative.

There was a solicitor present who discussed the legal aspects of footpaths. They, along with bridleways, are legally classed as highways and can be reported as such. There is a heavy fine for landowners who do not reinstate footpaths as the government requires.

There is only one footpath in the parish which is maintained by KCC, DO21, and the public are not supposed to clear footpaths, unless they are the landowner.  
Requests to clear footpaths can be made through KCC, who will contact the landowner. If no action is taken then KCC can serve an order to clear the path.  
The Council discussed whether now is a good time to contact the landowner or whether it would be best to wait. It was agreed that the council should contact the landowner now, requesting for the footpaths to be cleared in time for spring and, if the paths aren't clear, the Council will contact KCC.

7.5.1. Update on Map requested from KCC

Cllr Loukes has provided a map identifying all footpaths.

7.6. Planning – None to discuss

Since the printing of the agenda Application 23/01118 - Chapel Farm, Chapel Lane - has been granted.

**8. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

8.1. Clerk's Employment Contract – The Employment Committee were happy with all terms in the model contract from KALC. Two copies to be signed next month.

**9. QUESTIONS, ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS** To include items raised and noted at the meeting.

9.1. Cllr Loukes raised that the Consultation on the closure of Richborough Recycling Centre has been postponed. This doesn't mean that the Centre is saved, only that public opinion has delayed the decision for now.

**10. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED** All members of the public will be excluded at this point under Section 1 of the 1960 LGA Act

10.1. The Chairman suggested providing a short introduction of each Cllr in the December issue of the Escallop. Following discussion, the Council will not proceed as a few members of the Council aren't comfortable doing so.

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

Cllr J Kirk will take minutes due to the Clerk being unavailable.

## **Dover District Council Monthly Report for Little Stour and Ashstone**



### **Dover Fastrack**

The installation of the new bridge across the A2 is nearing completion which is a major milestone in the Dover Fastrack.

### **Dover District Housing needs survey**

The response from residents has now been processed and analysed and will soon be presented. This will help have an understanding housing needs at a local level and will inform the Council's strategy

### **General enforcement issues**

We continue to press hard on all enforcement issues.

### **New salad production company**

Simply Fresh is a company creating a vertical salad production unit next to Europa Nursery, Ash. This will give 25 new full time employment opportunities for local people.

### **Community Archaeological dig**

A new exhibition at Dover Museum is showcasing fascinating finds from archaeological digs around Dover's historic Maison Dieu. Medieval decorated stained glass and evidence of medieval and later buildings are fascinating finds being showcased.

### **Consultation on Dover District's green infrastructure strategy**

The consultation has now launched and runs for 6 weeks from 5pm on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November. This gives an opportunity for the public to have their say on this plan for a green and sustainable district. Everyone is invited to contribute on the consultation website or email [biodiversity@dover.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@dover.gov.uk).

### **Comments and Questions**

If a resident has comments or questions please contact your Parish Council in the first instance. Should you continue to have questions do contact your District Councillors.

*Trevor Bartlett and Martin Porter  
District Councillors  
November 2023*

Appendix b;

## KCC Member Report for Parishes – Sandwich Division

November 2023

**KCC's Budget Recovery Plan**, discussed at a Cabinet Meeting on 5 October, looks at the actions needed to bring this year's budget back into balance and to set the course for getting the council back to financial sustainability, securing the services that residents in Kent need the most, within the resources available from central government and local taxation. It was also emphasised that, contrary to some media reports KCC are not close to having to issue a S114 notice as some councils have had to do, KCC is securing our sustainable future.

The issue is also on the agenda for the County Council meeting postponed due to Storm Ciaran now being held on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

The council is facing an enormous rise in the cost of, and demand on, its services. The most significant pressures are in adult social care, home to school transport, and children's services.

The report highlights that, although making the necessary savings this year is achievable, these are mostly one-off measures. The key challenge is putting in place actions to minimise future spending increases and mitigating savings and income where increases are necessary over the medium term in order to safeguard the future financial stability of KCC.

**As part of the Kent Resilience forum KCC was extremely active last week in communicating the issues resulting from the storm.** Highways Teams were working 24/7 and the Call Centre had additional staff added to its out of hours team to ensure there was coverage overnight for emergency calls. Inevitably Highways are still catching up with the less urgent issues that are still ongoing, please do use the reporting tool to report faults, you will also find a number for urgent problems such as fallen trees, severe flooding etc. Some schools were closed along the coast but most stayed open, in general the issue schools had was staff travelling in particularly if they use public transport (this was the major factor in postponing the County Council meeting also).

A nature recovery strategy called **Making Space for Nature in Kent** is being developed. The strategy will set out measures to tackle habitat loss, safeguard ecosystems and create nature-rich landscapes full of wildlife-friendly habitats. It will also identify where in the county such action would deliver the most, not just in terms of nature but also the wider benefits a healthy and thriving natural environment can bring for all.

This locally led approach is new, with the strategy developed in collaboration with a range of partners from landowners and Kent's residents. A strategy informed by partners' priorities, data and knowledge will result in a plan owned by the very partners that will be critical to its delivery. The project will work with those that own and manage the land; those that influence how biodiversity is protected and enhanced; those that use and depend on nature's services; and those that inform and make decisions. Kent's residents are being asked their views right from the start and there will be many opportunities to get involved over the twenty months it's expected it will take to develop the strategy.

The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy is one of 48 across the country, which will create the England Nature Recovery Network, to deliver on the Government's commitment to ending the decline of nature and supporting its recovery. Once published, the strategy will be a critical evidence base for local plans and decision making and will be used to direct investment from government and green finance to where it will have the greatest effect. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) appointed KCC as the responsible authority to lead on this work, developing the strategy for both Kent and Medway. The work is fully funded by Defra.

I encourage anyone with a particular interest in this area to visit the KCC website to find out more and take the first survey: <https://www.makingspacefornaturekent.org.uk/get-involved/>

**Sue Chandler**  
**KCC Member for Sandwich and the villages**  
**[Sue.Chandler@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.Chandler@kent.gov.uk)**  
**07989134576**

Appendix c;

# **Community Speedwatch & SID Report**

**November 2023**

## **Speedwatch**

During the month of October to the the beginning of November we held 3 sessions and recorded 2 vehicles exceeding the target speed limit of 35 mph or above.

The maximum speed recorded on these sessions was 40 mph.

We are now into GMT and so we can be out earlier at the moment and finish earlier but it is not easy to have volunteers turning out at 07:30 in the morning on these cold days bearing in mind this is a voluntary service.

If members of the public are wanting to reduce speeds on our roads then the best thing they can do is to volunteer for Speedwatch. Action is better than talking!

## **SID**

Currently I have not installed the SID due to the Woodnesborough device not having been recovered.

They have claimed on their insurance.